



Comment on the Commentary of the Day

by

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Disclaimer: The following "Letters to the Editor" were sent to the respective publications on the dates indicated. Some were printed but many were not. The original articles that are being commented on may or may not be available on the internet and may require registration or subscription to access if they are. Some of the original articles are syndicated and therefore may have appeared in other publications also.

20 January 2008

The Editor, New York Times
229 West 43rd St.
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

Taking Steven Landsburg to task for showing no "compassion" for those "who have fallen victim to the deleterious side of free trade," Alan Ross completely misses Mr. Landsburg's point (Letters, January 20). Free trade, as Mr. Landsburg eloquently explains, has no victims. In the long run, it benefits everyone - even those who today lose their jobs to foreign rivals. The

vitaly important insight is that almost every job that Americans today worry about losing was made higher-paying, and even possible, by trade. For any worker to complain that he is victimized by trade would be akin, say, to Elvis Presley complaining that he was victimized by radio because that medium did so much to make the Beatles more popular than him.

19 January 2008

The Editor, New York Times
229 West 43rd St.
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

Bob Herbert says that "the average income for the vast majority of Americans actually declined" [from 1980 to 2005]. The standard of living for the average family has improved not because incomes have grown, but because women have gone into the workplace in droves" ("Good Jobs Are Where the Money Is," January 19).

The data suggest otherwise. First, in every Census Bureau breakdown of families according to number of spouses working, real median, as well as real mean, income is higher today than in

1980

[\[http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/f07ar.html\]](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/histinc/f07ar.html) - a fact nearly impossible to square with Mr. Herbert's claim that average incomes have fallen for the "vast majority of Americans." More to the point, median income for families in which both spouses worked in 1980 was (in 2005 dollars) \$60,313. In 2005 median income for families in which both spouses worked was \$78,755 - higher than the 1980 figure by 31 percent. Because, in these data, both spouses worked in 1980 and in 2005, this increase in median real income for these families cannot be the result of spouses entering the workforce since 1980.

18 January 2008

The Editor, New York Times
229 West 43rd St.
New York, NY 10036

To the Editor:

David Brooks cites research showing that voting is chiefly an expression of each voter's emotional reactions to candidates and the issues ("How Voters Think," January 18). Mr. Brooks overlooks, though, the

definitive work clarifying this view - namely, my colleague Bryan Caplan's 2007 book "The Myth of the Rational Voter." Bryan explains that the same person who weighs his options with at least passable rationality when buying a car or a can of peas typically is in a daze of irrationality when voting. The reason is simple: our private decisions are deterministic: if I choose the Honda over the Ford, I get the Honda. Not so in elections. If I vote for Clinton over McCain, chances are near-zero that my vote determines the election's outcome; I might still get McCain. So with no personal material consequences riding on which lever I pull in the voting booth, I suffer no downside to letting my emotions run wild on election day.

17 January 2008

Editor, The Wall Street Journal
200 Liberty Street
New York, NY 10281

To the Editor:

Arthur Brooks reports on research showing that "political intolerance in America ... is to be found more on the left than it is on the right" ("Liberal

Hatemongers," January 17). I'm not surprised. "The right," after all, includes many persons who are liberal in the original sense. These persons distrust centralized power and celebrate markets and free trade as liberating humankind from poverty, tyranny, and superstition. True liberals do not fancy themselves fit to tell others what to ingest, what not to smoke, what merchants to patronize, what insurance to buy, or otherwise how to live.

True liberals understand that society is indescribably complex and that our knowledge is always tentative. In contrast, too many of today's "liberals" - overestimating their own intelligence and underestimating both the intelligence of others and the dangers of government power - egotistically yearn to remake society according to their own images.

16 January 2008

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Harold Meyerson again asserts that ordinary workers today are no better

off than they were in the 1970s ("A Different Recession," January 16). Data backing this claim, however, are questionable - and are questioned frequently by serious scholars.

So let's explore for the facts using a different empirical technique: Ask workers today if they'd just as soon use their 2008 incomes to shop from, say, a 1975 Sears catalog (and pay 1975 prices) as shop at Sears.com (paying today's prices). If ordinary Americans in the 1970s were as well off as are ordinary Americans now, today's workers should jump at the opportunity to buy mid-70s goods at mid-70s prices while spending 2008 incomes. Alas, I'll bet that almost no one would choose the 1975 option. A small sample of what was unavailable back then includes CD and DVD players, home computers, food processors, digital cameras, camcorders, cordless phones, cell phones, and spandex clothing. Of course, the 1975 shopper did enjoy a nifty selection of typewriters, stereo turntables, 8-track players, black-and-white television sets, and heaps of clothing and bedding made from polyester.

15 January 2008

Editor, Washington Post
1150 15th St., NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Editor:

Anne Applebaum wisely calls upon environmentalists to recognize tradeoffs ("Tiny Car, Tough Questions," January 15). While the introduction of the \$2,500 Nano car in India might produce more greenhouse gases, it will also mean better lives for millions of people. This tradeoff, however, is likely not as stark as even Ms. Applebaum supposes. As Barun Mitra points out, opposition to the Nano is "an illustration of the head-in-the-sand mind-set, which pits rising demand for consumption against environmental conservation.

"In fact, as more Indians are able to afford more cars, the scale of consumption will help improve the technology, improve efficiency and clean up the environment. It is not a coincidence, that Toyota's ascent up the world auto league has been accompanied by its pioneering efforts in new technologies and

innovation. Though counter-intuitive, it is true of most areas of enterprise that only enhanced scales of consumption lead to improvement in efficiency - in this case, easily measured by tail-pipe emission."

<http://indefenceofliberty.org/story.asp?storyId=866>

14 January 2008

The Editor, New York
Times
229 West 43rd St.
New York, NY 10036

imperfect as they are,
statistics remain a far
better guide to the facts
than do feelings.

To the Editor:

Paul Krugman praises
Hillary Clinton as a
presidential candidate who
"seems comfortable with
and knowledgeable about
economic policy"
("Responding to
Recession," January 14).
Still praising Sen. Clinton,
he adds: "there's
something to be said for
presidents who know what
they're talking about."

I wonder what grade
Professor Krugman would
give to a student whose
term paper proclaimed - as
Ms. Clinton did last week
when announcing her
economic "stimulus" plan -
that "You know, the
economists can argue
about [whether the country
is headed for a recession].
Some say, yes, it's going
there. Some say, not yet.
Some say, oh, no. But the
statistics are one thing, the
stories are something
altogether different.... It
doesn't matter what you're
told. It's what you feel,
what you feel deep down."

In my classroom, that
answer gets an F. As